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## **Best Practices for Shelters**

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The VVMA recognizes that Vermont has many diverse communities, and thereby diverse animal shelters with varying budgets and mission/core values. These are general guidelines for the timing of medical and surgical procedures for shelter animals and should be adjusted to suit individual shelters, their communities and individual animal needs.

### **I. Upon Arrival**

Stray or relinquished animals should be examined by trained shelter personnel. It is ideal to have a separate intake area where animals stay for 5 days after arrival as well as a quarantine/isolation area for any sick animals.

- A. Scan for microchip. Initiate owner tracking for stray pets who have microchips. Record microchip number for relinquished pets for future use.
- B. Assess general physical condition.
  - 1. Appears healthy.
  - 2. Needs medical care.
    - a. Critical: any life-threatening, painful or serious condition needing immediate treatment. These include weakness, dehydration, emaciation, low or high body temperature, seizures or other neurological signs (handle with caution as animal could potentially have rabies), severe wounds (see also note below concerning wounds), bleeding, difficulty breathing, eye injury, bloated abdomen. Contact shelter or local veterinarian for further assessment and plan for treatment /care of the animal ASAP.
    - b. Non-critical: any other non-life-threatening condition needing treatment including fleas, ear mites, ear infections, skin abnormalities, coughing, sneezing, eye or nasal discharge, skin abnormalities, minor wounds, dental disease. Treat any of these more minor illnesses to maintain the comfort of the animal and minimize the spread of contagious diseases to healthy shelter animals.

- C. Consult and follow Vermont State Rabies Guidelines for any animal with bite wounds of unknown origin.
1. With unknown origin wounds and no vaccine history, the animal should be held in quarantine for the required stray period and then euthanized or held for 6 months with permission from the VT State Public Health Veterinarian.
  2. If a human bite has occurred the shelter should contact the VT Rabies Hotline (1-800-4-RABIES) for further instructions.
  3. Shelter personnel who have not been vaccinated for rabies should not handle these animals.
- D. Perform routine medical procedures
1. Deworm dogs and cats with pyrantel pamoate (1ml per 10# body weight or at dose prescribed by the shelter or local veterinarian) upon arrival and at least once 2 weeks later. For dogs and cats in shared areas, dose should be repeated every 2 weeks for the duration of their stay.
  2. Treat ectoparasites such as fleas, ear mites and mange mites as per shelter/local veterinarian protocol.
  3. Administer vaccinations ASAP to healthy animals:
    - a. Cats: feline distemper/respiratory viruses combination (modified live virus injectable +/- intranasal)
    - b. Dogs: distemper/parvo/adenovirus combination (modified live virus injectable); bordetella (intranasal and/or injectable)

II. **Prior to Offering for Adoption ( First Weeks After Stray-hold Period)**

- A. It is very important to perform a behavioral assessment during this time, both for the safety of future owners and others, and for the animal's long-term quality of life. Intake information, a behavioral evaluation (for which a testing protocol should be used) and daily observation of behaviors by shelter staff should be included in the behavioral assessment.
- B. Re-assess the physical health status and age of the dog for chronic or debilitating conditions. Will these conditions be manageable by a new owner? Consider here also the animal's long-term quality of life.
- C. Perform blood test for life-threatening/limiting disease and apply shelter policy as to whether an animal that tests positive for the disease will be treated, euthanized or adopted as a "special needs" pet, with the new owner accepting responsibility for treating or managing the condition.
1. Cats: leukemia +/- FIV
  2. Dogs: heartworm  
Dogs heartworm negative should be given a monthly heartworm preventive for the duration of their stay at the shelter.

- D. Repeat deworming and consider further assessment if any signs such as diarrhea, vomiting or weight loss occur.
- E. Perform any indicated medical treatments or behavioral interventions on animals deemed otherwise suitable for adoption.

### **III. Prior to Adoption**

- A. Surgical spay or neuter should be performed.
- B. Rabies vaccination should be administered to all cats and dogs 12 weeks of age or older, unless a valid rabies vaccination certificate was provided for a relinquished animal. This must be done by, or under the supervision of, a Vermont licensed veterinarian
- C. A microchip and/or a permanent spay/neuter mark should be placed in/on each animal.
- D. Each animal should have an examination by a veterinarian so that any condition identifiable by physical examination can be fully disclosed to a new owner. Such conditions might include abnormal weight, dental disease, abnormal heart or lung sounds and arthritis as well as behavioral abnormalities such as anxiety or aggression.
- E. The behavior of each animal should be monitored frequently during the shelter stay, and regularly re-assessed for adoptability or need for behavioral intervention.

### **IV. Additional Management Suggestions**

1. Follow-up each adoption with a phone call or written survey.
2. Have policies that reflect the temporary nature of shelter housing. Long-term cage life is not humane for animals.
3. Additional “Best Practices” materials are available at the websites of the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association and the Vermont Humane Federation.

## **MEDICAL FLOW CHART FOR CATS AND DOGS ENTERING SHELTER**

### **UPON ARRIVAL**

- Scan for Microchip
- General Health Assessment
  - Healthy
  - Critical Illness
  - Non-Critical Illness
  - Wounds
- Routine Treatments
  - Deworming
  - Ectoparasites
  - Initial Vaccinations

### **PRIOR TO OFFERING FOR ADOPTION**

- Behavioral Assessment
- Chronic Conditions Assessment
- Heartworm/Leukemia Testing
- Ongoing Parasite Treatment
- Medical/Behavioral Treatment/Intervention (If Needed)

### **PRIOR TO ADOPTION**

- Spay/Neuter
- Rabies Vaccination
- Place Microchip
- Pre-Adoption Veterinary Exam (If None Prior)

### **POST ADOPTION**

- Follow-Up